

Office of Space Commercialization

GPS:

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HEADLINE: Device takes the search out of search and rescue

BYLINE: By Susan Cocking

BODY:

MIAMI _ Getting lost in the Everglades used to mean waiting up to several days for help to arrive.

But starting in July, hikers in the Everglades and other remote areas of the United States will be able to buy personal emergency beacons that summon help quickly. Last month, the Federal Communications Commission approved a request by NOAA to make the small, handheld units available to the public. They are expected to be priced between \$300 and \$800.

According to NOAA administrator and retired Admiral Conrad Lautenbacher, the personal emergency beacons work by flipping them open to transmit a signal to passing NOAA satellites. The signal gives the bearer's position in **Global Positioning System** (or **GPS**) coordinates, which are beamed to a ground station in Suitland, Md.

The station relays the coordinates to joint rescue and coordination centers, which are in 24-hour contact with the U.S. Coast Guard, Civil Air Patrol, park rangers and mountain rescue patrols. The system is similar to EPIRB, used to locate lost boats and aircraft.

"It takes the search out of search-and-rescue," Lautenbacher said.

Lautenbacher said the device is effective, locating 250 people during experimental trials in remote areas of Alaska. Worldwide, the Cospas-Sarsat satellite system connected to EPIRB units has been responsible for rescuing some 14,000 people in its 20-year existence.

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